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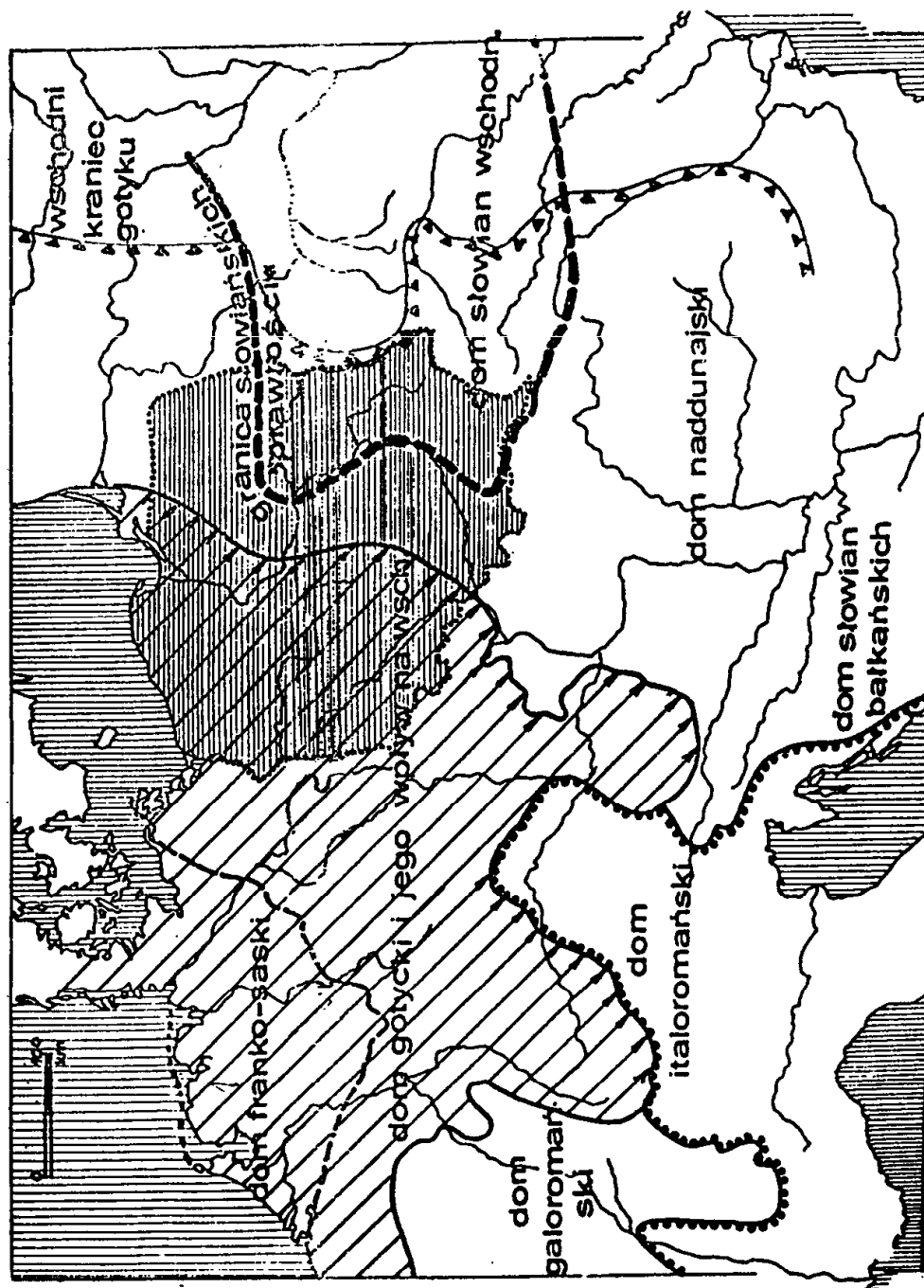
The Architecture of Polish Villages and Small Towns in Open Landscape

The Polish landscape contains a wealth of historical monuments representing the nation's cultural heritage accumulating there, in the centre of Europe, for the past thousands years. Their specific character is noticeable not only in the urbanized areas but also in the open spaces of agricultural landscape — in villages and small towns meeting the needs of agriculture and also in larger regional centres. The multi-plane spatial layout of the settlement network, established already in the early medieval period, has persisted, unchanged, in a considerable part of Poland's territory up to the present time. As before it makes the traditional 'groundwork' for the development of agricultural landscape, creating a charming mosaic of small plots characteristic of traditional agriculture no longer encountered in other parts of Europe. This applies especially to the region known as Little Poland, where — in the mountainous terrain — individual farming of the so-called forest *lanei*¹ favoured preservation of tradition. The system of joint cultivation, also preserved in the traditional *niwa* villages; i.e. those with the three-field system, was dominant in the lowlands of Northern Poland.

The layout of the built-up areas and organization of habitation plots were also dependent on configuration of the terrain and its covering. The steep slopes of the hills framing the woody valleys were used, in the case of private farming, for the cultivation of plots reaching upwards, whereas the rivers and streams flowing at the bottom of the valleys favoured the development of villages built on the so-called 'street' and 'chain' plan. The evolution of agrarian culture in those regions, going on for ages, is still clearly noticeable, and the continued application of the layout bears evidence of its vitality.

Many of the scientific works, as well as publications intended for the general public, deal with the indigenous culture of the rural community in Poland. A monumental source in this field is the work entitled: *Polski Atlas Etnograficzny (Polish Ethnographical Atlas)*, prepared in the years 1964–1972, by a team of scholars, under the editorship of Józef Gajka. All

¹one *laneus* = some 30–35 acres (pl. *lanei*) [transl. note].



- 1) Franco-Saxon house
- 2) Gothic house and its influence on the East
- 3) Gallo-Romanesque house
- 4) Italo-Romanesque house
- 5) Balkan Slavs' house
- 6) Eastern boundary of Gothic architecture
- 7) Boundary of the Early Slav Territories
- 8) Eastern Slavs' house
- 9) Danubian House

Fig. 1. The boundary of the influence exerted on the traditional building of houses in Central Europe. Ref. J. W. Raczyński: *Podstawy rewaloryzacji architektury w regionach krajoznawczych (Fundamental Principles of Revitalization of Architecture in Landscape Regions)*, Politechnika Krakowska, Monografia Nr 35

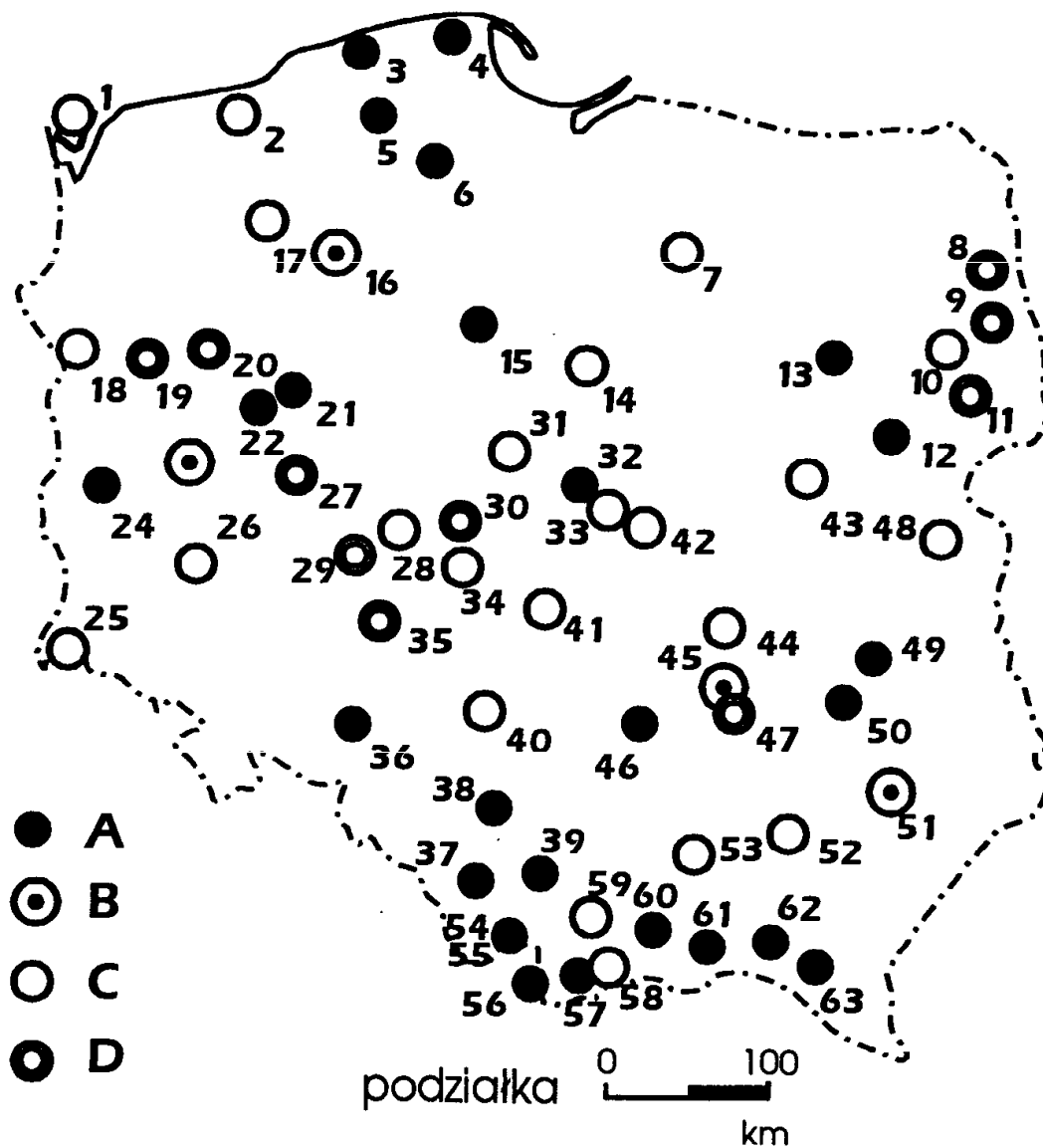


Fig. 2. Location of the existing and designed Skansen-type museums and centres in Poland

- A) Museums in existence (under construction); B) Museums in existence *in situ*; C) Museums designed; D) Museums designed *in situ*: 1. Wolin, 2. Jamno, 3. Kluki, 4. Nadole, 5. Sominy, 6. Wdzydze Kiszewskie, 7. Olsztynek, 8. Nowy Dwór, 9. Kruszyniany, 10. Białystok, 11. Czyże, 12. Ciechanowiec, 13. Nowogród, 14. Sierpc, 15. Toruń, 16. Stara Święta, 17. Osiek, 18. Bogdaniec, 19. Pszczew, 20. Dęba, 21. Lednogóra, 22. Swarzędz, 24. Wolsztyn, 25. Markocice, 26. Lubicz, 27. Brzostków-Żertków, 28. Kalisz, 29. Kalisz-Zawodzie, 30. Cewków, 31. Skoki, 32. Murzyce, 33. Łowicz, 34. Sieradz, 35. Bolesławiec, 36. Opole, 37. Pszczyna, 38. Chorzów, 39. Lipowic, 40. Listów, 41. Wolbórz, 42. Mszczonów, 43. Liw, 44. Radom, 45. Bodzentyn, 46. Tokarnia, 47. Kakonin, 48. Styrzyniec, 49. Lublin, 50. Pszczela Wola, 51. Biłgoraj, 52. Kolbuszowa, 53. Żegocina, 54. Zubrzyca, 55. Chocholów, 56. Witów, 57. Jurgów, 58. Niedzica, 59. Łopuszna, 60. Nowy Sącz, 61. Szymbark, 62. Bóbrka, 63. Sanok.

the earlier and later studies corroborated the latitudinal direction of the boundary between the influence zone of Western and Eastern culture and the fact that it runs precisely across the middle of Polish territory. In the area of architecture this is confirmed by the reach of appearance of, respectively, the crown timber-work of houses built in the eastern part of Poland, rich in forests, and the framework construction of buildings which was characteristic of Western Europe. This also applies to dominance of the double-gable roof ousting eastwards the original hip-roof construction adopted in Polish rural architecture.

At the present, alas, ever more frequently observed is the phenomenon of the disappearance of the traditional forms of indigenous architecture in favour of cosmopolitan houses of urban type. Hence the necessity of transferring the most valuable items of regional building to the open-air 'Skansen' type museums, relatively numerous in Poland, and also of taking some areas under protection, as for example in the case landscape parks set up for this purpose. A telling illustration of the case is the complex of the Jura Landscape Parks, situated in the northern part of Cracow Voivodship. In Poland there are still to be found rural areas with predominantly wooden architecture, unique in the Europa of today. It is worth mentioning here the architecture of the Polish Spisz and Orawa region and in particular, of the villages of Witów and Chochółów. Attachment to, and continued development of, the traditional forms of regional architecture is manifest in the new buildings erected in Zakopane and other localities of the sub-Tatran area.

The works of sacral wooden architecture in Poland rank among the most numerous group of this type of buildings in the whole of Europe. It covers at least a few hundred of wooden Catholic and Orthodox churches, of unique forms characteristic of the region, and still performing their sacral functions. Those picturesque churches make the highlight of the Polish rural landscape. Its characteristic features are also the numerous roadside crosses and shrines situated mostly at the intersections of traditional routes, at the entrance into, and the extreme end of, the built-up area of villages and in spots of historic importance.

It is unfortunate that the Jewish wooden synagogues of unique architectural forms were completely burned during the Nazis occupation of Poland during the Second World War.

The oldest wooden village churches which have survived until this day are more than five hundred years old. In many of them beautiful polychrome paintings have been preserved. The greatest value of those historical monuments is, however, their integration with the cultural landscape of the country for, as has already been mentioned, almost all of those churches, surrounded with care of, continue to exercise their sacral functions and serve the local parish communities. It is a paradox that a threat to them has recently become the fashion of building new churches in brick,

of which some three thousands were erected in the past decade. Their location is often in collision with the historical complexes of sacral wooden architecture.

A cause for worry — as regards components of the scenery of the Polish rural areas and small towns — are the old manor and palace complexes which form, together with the parks surrounding them, evidence of gentry culture in Poland. At the conclusion of War World II their number was estimated at more than 20,000. At present, those recorded in the conservators' files amounts to barely 5,000 of mostly devastated palace and park complexes. The task of their restoration, and often rather of their complete reconstruction, has become the concern of the conservation service or of former owners.

A particularly valuable component of the Polish open landscape are the complexes of the small towns dating from the Middle Ages. Their spacious market squares, with streets running from them and the parish church in one corner, are often lined with characteristic, low, arcaded buildings. Owing to the fact that the population of those settlement units was, for the major part, living from agriculture, those small towns were not subject to such an intensive process of urbanization and industrialization as some other parts of the country. Consequently, many of them have survived until this day in their original shape, representing the historical structural pattern of the provinces in Poland. For some of those localities, the past is still manifest in their layout, as for example the walled towns of Szydłów and Paczków.

The above deliberations give the grounds for the statement that the traditional architecture and landscape of Polish villages and small towns incorporate many forms and structures of great value into the diversity of European culture and as such call for their restoration and protection against the powerful surge of uniformity.